

PUNISHING A "SHACKER."

An Episode of Southern Life.

In the year 1870 I had business that called me to the scene of operations on the Savannah and Memphis Railroad, in the eastern part of Alabama. The work was then in the hands of contractors, who were grading the road and laying iron about nine miles from Opelika. They were pushing forward with a large force of negroes, and the original method for obtaining a maximum of labor from each employé presented one of those curious phases of negro character which can never be imitated by the droll artists of the minstrel stage. My friend, one of the contractors, had charge of the work at this point.

"I never fine my bands for neglect of duty," he remarked to me, "but you will see something to-night that will appear strange to you, while it will explain the operation of a system of punishment in which I take no active part, and which is far more effective than fines."

It was natural that the more faithful laborers should take an interest in seeing that where all are paid alike they should perform the same amount of labor; and to enforce this idea of justice there was in operation among the negroes a system more despotic than a court-martial, and more unrelenting than an inquisition. Prominent in the camp was a negro from the rice fields of South Carolina. His head was shaped like a wedge; he was black as ebony; his hair was tied up with a white cotton string in small rolls over his head; he was tall and gaunt, and had the strength of Hercules. He was called Long Henry.

The unsophisticated "country niggers" in those days were not known among their acquaintance by any surname, though in registering to vote, they gave a name that suited their fancy; and it was seldom that brothers, or even father and sons, had the same family name. But where, as in this case, there were several in a community who bore the same Christian name, they were distinguished by an *à propos* prefixed adjective. Sometimes this was applied to an individual merely for some marked peculiarity, and thus it was with Long Henry. He was a marvel of length. Then there was "Wattle-head Ellick," and "Knock-kneed Ellick"; there was "Yaller Tom," with a tinge of Seminole blood that straightened his hair and accounted for his laziness, and "Kinky-head Tom"; there was a "Big-mouth Jake," and a "Bow-legged Jake"—and so on through the gang. These names actually appeared on the books of the time-keeper.

At sundown a horn was blown, and all hands, after depositing their shovels, spades, and picks in a log cabin, proceeded to the "Commissary" with an alacrity of step and an expectancy of manner that puzzled me. I approached the "Commissary" with my friend. The man in charge was bringing to the door something in a wooden bucket. In one hand he held a tin cup.

"Water?" I asked my friend.

"Whisky," he replied.

Long Henry had taken the first drink as it was handed out by the store-keeper—a privilege invariably accorded him on account of the dignity of his office. Long Henry had never been known to "shack" as shirking work, or "lying up" in the cabins, was called. He cleared his throat and stepped upon an empty soap-box near the door, looked around until his glance found my friend's face—from which it did not wander an instant—folded his black, brawny arms, and leaned against the house, a magnificent picture of strength.

Soon came Yaller Tom's turn at the cup, and there was an expression on his face that attracted my attention. He seemed to feel that he was treading on a hidden mine that might be sprung without a moment's warning. While the store-keeper was stooping to refill the cup a quick, meaning look passed between my friend and Long Henry. The mine had been sprung. My friend had discovered during the day some "shacking" from Yaller Tom.

No sooner had Long Henry recognized the glance than his eyes flashed, his huge muscles knotted; he drew a deep inspiration and shouted at the top of his powerful voice:

"Fire-e-esh fish!"

"Salt bin down!" was immediately responded by a voice in the crowd.

These cries were as terrifying as is the shrill scream of a panther to a benighted hunter who, alone, has lost his way in the swamp.

Then followed a remarkable scene. Yaller Tom was seized by six strong men, who were apparently as ravenous as wolves and as ferocious as tigers; a rope was fastened securely around his ankles, firmly binding his feet together; the other end was thrown over the branch of a tree, and Yaller Tom was suspended, head downward. His hands were tied to two stakes in the ground about four feet apart, and he looked like an inverted cross, stretched taut and immovable.

Long Henry had moved from the box, and watched the proceedings with a grand, grim satisfaction. The important moment had arrived. He drew from a niche between the poles of which the "Commissary" was built a smooth oaken board, four feet long, four inches wide, and one inch thick. It was called "Betsy."

"Prepar!" he commanded, in a stern voice.

The flesh of the victim was immediately exposed. Gertrude had Virginia in chancery. The wash-house scene in *'Assommoir'* was a reality.

Long Henry left his box, approached Yaller Tom, assumed an attitude, and raised the board on high. His glance followed it. He was majestic at this moment, slow and full of dignity. His eye fell from the board to the exposed part of his victim, and the terrible flail fell, crushing and crashing. As he raised it he sang "hey!" as it fell, "HE!" in that sing-song rhythm so dear to the heart of a timber-cutter in the pine forests of the South. It was cruel—terrific. There was a marker to count the blows.

"Hey—HE!"

"One!"

"Hey—HE?"

"Two!"

"Hey—HE!"

"Three!"

"Hey—HE!"

"Four!"

The flesh of the victim quivered and writhed under the deadening thud of the blows, which fell slowly and in perfect

time to the cadence of the singular and monotonous song. With invariable regularity did the eye of Long Henry follow the board as he raised it to strike, and as regularly did he glance down at the spot before striking—all the time keeping up his song while the marker called the number.

Great blisters that had the color of ashes soon appeared on the dark brown skin of Yaller Tom. At the tenth blow they assumed a dark, purplish hue; then a little blood trickled down Yaller Tom's back. Long Henry was proficient, and "Betsy" was doing her work well.

Twenty times did the merciless board heavily fall; twenty times had Long Henry sung his monotonous chant; twenty times had his eye followed the board upward and then fell on his victim—then Long Henry ceased.

He drew a deep breath, whistled "phew!" as if quite exhausted, scraped the perspiration from his forehead with the fingers of his left hand, and slung it off with a dexterous flip of the fingers. He looked at the board caressingly, carefully wiped the blood from the smooth surface, polished it anew with a little tallow and a woollen rag that he drew from a chink in the wall; took out his old pocket-knife, which was simply an old case-knife with half the blade broken off; cut a small notch in the board at the end of a long row of notches, yawned, and returned the board to the niche between the poles of the "Commissary." Negro justice had been most thoroughly vindicated. W. C. MORROW, JR.

OAKLAND, June 23, 1879.

THE PARD'S EPISTLE TO THE TUOLUMNEITE,

OAKLAND, June 30, 1879.

OLD SON:—Thought I'd drop ye a line or two fur old acquaintance. Got kinder lonesome thinkin' o' the boys up round Rawhide an' Table Mountain, so I grabs my pen to let ye know how I'm makin' it down yere. I'm takin' it all in, ye bet yer sweet life, an' I don't think I'll let till up it strikes the bedrock—mebbe I'll sink on the hard pan; there's no tellin'. Talk about rackets! Why, I've tackled more reg'lar an' out kin games, an' more hoggin' deals, n'd patch Montezuma Flat a mile. I've hed more jobs put up on me since I've bin browns' round Frisco 'tis yer camp 'n'd set up a three-keerd monte sharp in bizness. Ev'rybody's on the make—dead on it, an' no mistake—an' they don't make no more bones about layin' fur ye to rob ye 'n' you would to set 'em up fur the crowd. They've got it down fine, old son, an' don't furgit it. To tell ye the truth, I hevn't struck a squar' game sence I come down, an' if I don't keep my eyes peeled they'll knock h—l's delights out o' my profits on the Little Humber sale; the chances are two to one that ef I let these yere friends o' mine swing my sack fur me one week you'd see me back at Jackass pirootin' fur grub money. But I ain't the kind—you hear me; an' ef they beat me *too* bad I'll stand it like a little man—I'll ante an' pass the buck too quick. Talkin' bout jobs, mebbe ye'll think I'm lyin' when I mention "a little real estate transaction," ez they called it, that they fired me into. Hedn't bin over yere in Oakland two days w'en Si Comstock—ye know Si; used ter go it heavy in politics in Tuolumne 'tih George Evans an' John Sedgwick an' that crowd—sends up his keerd to me at the Gran' Central tavern. Now, Si an' I use ter bunk together in '53 down on Injun Bar, an' I always thought he was party squar'; I'd a bet high on Si standin' fur a straight top keerd all the time, an' I'd a bin very apt to turned loose on the rooster that didn't stand in 'tih me on them sentiments. But Si Comstock hez played it too low down fur yours truly, an' I ken ketch him out late some night I'll make it mighty livly for you, brotherly.

Ez I was sayin', Si sends up his keerd, an' I prances down stairs expectin' to hev a good ol'-time talk about the boys we run with on the Tuolumne. But I found that wasn't his gait. Sed he'd heered o' my big strike in Bodie, an' thought he'd put me in the way o' doublin' my pile—he'd the tallest kind of an inves'ment fur me in the real estate line. Thinks I to myself, here's the genuine article, here's what I call friendship. So I straddles bis blind, an' calls fu' keerds. But Si lowed he wasn't the operator—I've seen sech a d—d sight o' "operators" an' "operations" sence I come to the Bay, that I'm given' ye the dips an' spurs o' a true fissure vein wen' I calls "operators" thieves, an' "operations" top an' bottom deals, survey?—an' w'at does he do but pilot me round to a spot on Broadway, where a red-whiskered duck shows me a big leather map streaked all over it red, white, an' blue squares like a sweat-cloth. Thinkin' o' sweat-cloths, I looks round the shop, an' I hope I'll be shot to-morrer mornin' if I didn't come to be conclusion that I'd bin roped into a bunko game. I'd hed a little o' that racket wen' I first come to Frisco, an' I was on the look-out fur such snaps. The red, white, an' blue maps on the walls, the big black safe in the corner, an' the gab o' the red-whiskered galoot was so much simlar to a game I'd been run into in Frisco that I took a good squar' squint at Si to make out whether he hadn't gone into the bizness or steerer fur the house. That was the fust suspicion I hed that ther' was anythin' wrong, an' it wasn't long afore I dropped on another little game my friend Si Comstock an' the red-whiskered duck was fixin' up fur my benefit. It was a town lot deal they was on. They hed lots staked off all over the leather map, an' they was explainin' to me w'ere the parks was goin' to be, how many artesian wells ther' was to the squar' mile, an' how fur it was from the railroad. It was the biggest spec in the market—everybody was goin' to settle down on them town lots, an' pay the biggest kind o' prices for the privilege. "How much?" sez I, purtendin' to understand the hull layout.

"Five hundred dollars a lot," sez the red whiskered man; "and you'll never git sech another chance ef ye live five hundred years. These lots is jest agoin' ter boom clean up into the thousan's in the fall. Take ten lots an' make yer everlasting fortune afore Chris'mas."

"We're is these lots?" sez I.

"On San Pablo Bay," sez the lot sharp, "we're right w'e're we ken bring ship an' keer together. I tell you w'at," he sez, tacklin' a new lay, "ther's goin' ter be a city ten times bigger'n Frisco afore many years on these very lots I'm a showin' ye. Why, look at the stretch o' back kentry." And that red-whiskered duck run his finger over a yaller patch marked "Contra Costa." "Ther's wheat land enough," he sez, "to supply the world, an' they've got ter ship it from our wharves."

"Good enough," sez I. "I'll take a lot on spec." An' arter some more palaver I planks down the coin.

Talk 'bout yer monumental fools! I'm the tallest monument in the bone-yard. But it was that old son of a thief, Si Comstock, who was placin' dependence on. Ev'ry time the red-whiskered chap'd chip Si'd come to the centre 'tih some remark 'bout commerce an' nat'ral progress of growin' cities. So I invests—goes it blind—an' you needn't larf w'en I tell ye that my friends rakes down the pot, col' soul. The nex' day I takes a trip down to New Philadelphia—that's the high-toned name o' the place w're my town lot is. It didn't take me long to find out w're New Philadelphia was. Ev'rybody in that section kin pint out w're it's goin' ter be ez soon ez they fill in out to ther water front. I ain't much on divin' games, so I didn't find out w'ether the mud on my lot is solid enough fur foundations or not. Talk 'bout swindles, Bill, the town lot racket beats 'em all. "Tain't the \$500 I'm squealin' 'bout, it's the ijit I made o' myself. I've bin huntin' fur Si Comstock, my Injun Bar pard, but he's keepin' shady—gone to the Springs, the other town-lot sharps say. Well, I reckon 'tis a little healthier up 'round them springs 'tis down yere jest now, you hear me shout. Don't you go investin' in town lots in no New Philadelphia if you know what's good fur ye. I've got one satisfaction, though—the red-whiskered rooster was yanked inter quod the other day fur robin' widder's an' orphins—"embezzlin' society fun's," these diamon'-plated galoots calls it. I call it robin', an' the wust in the deck. What's your opinion, old son?

Tell the boys down to Frisbie's thet I'm jest a-throwin' myself. It's the biggest spree I ever tackled, an' I ain't nigh a let up on it either. I've got coin enough to run 'tih the nobs o' this yer camp, an' I'm hevin' a h—l of a time you betcher. You oughter jes' see me floppin' 'round the fang-dangos an' sick—balls an' parties the nobs calls 'em. O' corse the nobs don't keer a whoopin' cuss fur Jim Snaggleby, but they're mighty lovin' w'en they hears his saek jingle. Why, Bill, old son, I've got five Pine Street stock sharps on a string, an' I don't know how many small fry speculators is tryin' to make me think they've got a dead open an' shut game on my bank 'count. Two or three o' them want to ring me in on the son-in-law lead, but I ain't goin' to hev it, not much. Ever sense that town lot break I've tumbled, an' I don't yield a color to the pan ef I knows it. I'll keep ye posted on w'at I'm doin', so's ye ken let the boys down to Frisbie's know the rackets I'm on, an' I won't hev to spend all my valuable time scratchin' billy doos to 'em. Mebbe I'll move up to Tubbs' tavern nex' week, so, ef ye write to me, send yer letter to Oakland an' I'll git it. W'en ye write, let me know how Tom White is makin' out 'tih his gravel claim, an' don't furgit to give my regards—regards is good—to the widd'er. I s'pose Sandy got them back numbers o' the 'Zaminer'; I sent 'em las' Saturday; an' you ken tell him I was speakin' to the sup'rintendent o' the 'Zaminer', and he sez Tilden's chances is fast class. Did Rufe Simons git them patent socks I sent up, an' w'at's he think o' them? The patent's on the heels an' the toes. Tell Jack Cummings I'll tend to that roomy remedy bizness ez soon's I ken git over to Frisco. The pill shops over yere ain't got the brand he sent fur. Don't furgit ter drop me a line er two, an' b'lieve me. Yer Old Pard, JIM SNAGGLEBY.

WILLIAM BELCHER, Tuttleton,
Tuolumne County, via Copperopolis.

The Rev. Lysander D. Palmer resigned from the pastorate of the Baptist Church in Jackson, Michigan, several years ago, in consequence of charges affecting his morality. A committee had been appointed to investigate his conduct, but his resignation, coupled with a confession that he had, by paying innocent but indiscreet attention to some of his sisters, injured his influence for good, caused the matter to be dropped. He is now endeavoring to get back into the ministry, and the case is reopened. One of the documents brought to light is a love letter written by him to a married woman. It is addressed to "My priceless jewel, my heart's love, my own best beloved," and proceeds as follows: "I have wandered about to-day like one in dreamland. My heart cries for its treasure and will not be satisfied. I will not attempt to tell you how I have spent the time since my idol left me, for you might think me foolish; but I am thankful that I may in a few hours gaze into your face again and see those precious eyes speak love to my heart, and feel again the thrill of bliss your presence gives." He confesses and laments his inability to express in words all that he feels, but he makes an effort thus: "Know this, beloved: there are no words human lips ever pronounced that could express my devotion to you. It controls my whole being. I live but in thy love, my darling; I plan but for thy comfort. I desire only to make thee happy. I pray that heaven's choicest gifts may fall on thee, my charmer. May angels kiss thy eyelids and whisper sweet thoughts of me in thine ears. Good night, my heavenly treasure." The reverend gentleman closes with the following parody:

"Precious lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,
For my heart is past control,
And my love is burning high.
Hide me, oh, my darling, hide—
Hold me, loved one, hold me fast;
Fold me closely to thy side,
And thy arms around me clasp."

There is in Switzerland a little inn much frequented by travelers, which has no other attractions to commend it except the healthiness of the locality and the beauty of the scenery.

During the first days of their sojourn the visitors pass most of the dinner-hour gazing on the lovely scene before them, but as their health is restored and they take long mountain rambles in the bracing air they develop remarkable appetites. The innkeeper, though he has made his calculations for this contingency and charges accordingly, is none the less horrified and disgusted.

"Big, big I—The Alps!" he says at last, shaking his fist at them; "if it wasn't for those infernal excrescences I'd make my fortune here."

"Why," asked a governess of her little charge, "do we give God to give us our daily bread? Why do we give four days or five days, or a week?" "Because," replied the ingenuous child.